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Report of the UN/CEFACT Rapporteur for Africa (2013–2014)

I. Introduction

1. The period 2013–2014 has been fairly busy in the African region with, inter alia, the organization of the second international conference on Single Windows.

2. The following is a summary of the UN/CEFACT Rapporteur's activities.

II. Finalization of the Guidelines for Single Window Implementation, February 2013, Saly, Senegal

3. A workshop on the Guidelines for Single Window Implementation in Africa was held in Saly, Senegal, from 7 to 10 February 2013. Its outcome was a finalized version of the Guidelines, which was then published online at www.swguide.org in April 2013, since when there has been a sharp increase in the number of hits on the website. It is planned to update the Guidelines every two years.

III. Seventh Executive Committee meeting and fourth General Assembly of the African Alliance for e-Commerce, 7 to 9 April 2013, Dakar, Senegal

4. The African Alliance for e-Commerce (AAEC) held its seventh Executive Committee meeting and fourth General Assembly on 8 and 9 April 2013 at the Hotel Amaryllis, Saly, Senegal.

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5. The meetings were attended by representatives of: Benin, Burkina Faso, Cameroon, Côte d'Ivoire, the Democratic Republic of the Congo, Egypt, Ghana, Kenya, Libya, Madagascar, Morocco, Senegal and Tunisia.

6. They produced the following outcomes:

A. Executive Committee

- Consideration of new applications for membership (Benin, Egypt and the West African Economic and Monetary Union (WAEMU));
- Process of validation of the Guidelines for Single Window Implementation in Africa;
- Review of the action plan to recruit a Permanent Secretary for AAEC;
- Presentation of reports of awareness-raising workshops on Single Window implementation in Africa;
- Presentation and approval of the technical and financial report;
- Preparation of the International Single Window Conference in Antananarivo, Madagascar.

B. General Assembly

- The candidatures of the Société d'Exploitation du Guichet Unique du Bénin (SEGUB) (Benin), the Egyptian International Trade Point (EIPT), the Autonomous Port of Abidjan (PAA) and WAEMU were presented. As no reservations were expressed, the General Assembly approved them.

IV. Third International Single Window Conference, 16 to 18 September 2013, Antananarivo, Madagascar

7. Together with the Malagasy customs agency and GasyNet, AAEC organized the Third International Single Window Conference at the Carlton Anosy Hotel, Antananarivo, Madagascar, from 16 to 18 September 2013. The theme of this third Conference was "Single Window: Systems interconnectivity, boosting trade facilitation".

8. The event was supported by the World Bank, the United Nations Economic Commission for Africa, the United Nations Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific, the African Development Bank and the World Customs Organization.

9. The Conference attracted a total of 96 delegates from different countries around the world, including: Angola, Benin, Burkina Faso, Cameroon, the Comoros, Côte d'Ivoire, the Democratic Republic of the Congo, Ethiopia, France, Gabon, Ghana, Mauritius, Kenya, Libya, Malawi, Mali, Nigeria, Madagascar, Morocco, Mozambique, Nigeria, Senegal, Seychelles, Singapore, Switzerland, Tunisia, Togo and Yemen. There was also a large number of local participants, with more than 200 guests.

10. The following issues were addressed during the Conference:

- Single Window: Systems interconnectivity, boosting trade facilitation;
- Africa: Prospects and projects;
- Single Windows and regional integration;

- Technical and regulatory requirements;
- Funding and sustainability;
- Best practices;
- Presentation of the AAEC Guidelines for Single Window Implementation.

11. AAEC held its eighth Executive Committee meeting alongside the Conference on 18 September 2013. The meeting was attended by 20 participants from AAEC member countries (Benin, Cameroon, Côte d'Ivoire, the Democratic Republic of the Congo, Ghana, Kenya, Madagascar, Mali, Senegal and Tunisia).

V. National workshops to raise awareness of Single Windows

12. AAEC held four workshops in 2013 to raise awareness of the Single Window concept in: Uganda (21 and 22 March); Burundi (25 and 26 March); Niger (11 and 12 June); and Egypt (24 and 25 November). Co-organized by each country's ministry responsible for trade, the workshops brought together the different agencies involved, including banks, ports, customs and government agencies and chambers of commerce. They provided an opportunity to share best practices from Single Window implementation between operators and countries with projects in the area.

VI. Links with other international organizations

A. International Trade Centre

13. On 24 October 2013, the AAEC Chairperson visited the Division of Business and Institutional Support of the International Trade Centre (ITC). He introduced AAEC and took part in discussions on possible avenues of collaboration between the two organizations, focusing on the idea of setting up an e-commerce platform for the WAEMU zone. ITC committed itself to mobilizing potential funding partners for the platform.

B. United Nations Conference on Trade and Development

14. The Chairman made a working visit to the Palais des Nations in Geneva on 25 October 2013 to discuss possible areas for partnership with the United Nations Conference on Trade and Development (UNCTAD). Both organizations expressed their willingness to jointly organize a seminar for AAEC members on the legal implementation of electronic transactions in Single Windows. The seminar should take place in the second half of 2014.

C. Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species of Wild Fauna and Flora

15. AAEC visited the headquarters of the Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species of Wild Fauna and Flora (CITES) in Geneva on 24 October 2013 to discuss the possibility of AAEC members using the electronic version of CITES permits. The idea was raised of setting up a project with pilot countries in Africa during 2014. The two organizations are currently working on the project outline.

D. African Development Bank

16. The Chairman, accompanied by Mr. Isidore Biyiha, AAEC Vice-Chairman and Chairman-Director-General of the Single Window for Foreign Trade Operations (GUCE) of Cameroon, made a working visit to the African Development Bank (AfDB) from 17 to 19 June 2013 to promote AAEC and to present the peer review project. Following the Bank's call for proposals, AAEC submitted the projects below for funding:

- Establishment of a foreign trade portal in Africa;
- Establishment of a continental certification authority (public key infrastructure (PKI)) platform;
- Establishment of an electronic document exchange platform.

E. Universal Postal Union

17. The Universal Postal Union (UPU) has decided to launch a project to develop e-commerce in Africa through the postal network. The head of the Africa and Least Developed Countries regional programme indicated the Union's wish to make AAEC a privileged partner in this project. An official letter is to be sent to AAEC inviting it to join the working group and submit a joint project to WAEMU.

F. Pan-Asia e-Commerce Alliance

18. In January 2014, AAEC and the Pan-Asia e-Commerce Alliance signed a memorandum of understanding to facilitate future negotiations on sharing experiences and solutions and adopting joint pilot projects in the two regions.

VII. Ongoing projects

A. Pilot projects to set up an electronic certificate of origin exchange platform between Senegal, Côte d'Ivoire, Cameroon and Chad or the Congo

19. The project to set up an electronic certificate of origin exchange platform in the WAEMU zone (Senegal/Côte d'Ivoire) and the Central African Economic and Monetary Community zone (Cameroon/Chad or the Congo) is intended to ensure that applications for, and issuance and presentation of, certificates of origin between those countries becomes simpler and more secure and thus to facilitate trade in the two zones. The establishment of the platform is also an excellent opportunity to reduce obstacles to the free movement of goods in the regional economic communities.

B. Assessment of the impact of Single Windows on the movement of goods through Africa's ports

20. The World Bank has decided to assist AAEC with a peer review project to assess the impact of Single Windows on the movement of goods in the target countries. The aim is to produce an objective assessment highlighting all the positive points and identifying any weaknesses.

21. The first group of target countries for the peer review is:

- Senegal (Gaindé 2000);
- Cameroon (e-GUCE);
- Madagascar (GasyNet).

VIII. Planned projects

A. Continental electronic document exchange platform for inter- and intra-community trade procedures

22. The aim of this project is to reduce delays and improve the reliability of cross-border trade procedures.

B. Establishment of a continental infrastructure to pool PKI resources

23. A continental authority should allow Africa to reduce the cost of e-commerce transactions by means of an infrastructure that would enable all countries to issue electronic documents with an electronic signature.

C. Portal for foreign trade procedures in Africa

24. The objective is to promote intra-African trade through a portal giving access to trade procedures, costs, players in the logistics chain and the top 100 importers and exporters in each African country.

D. Extension of awareness-raising workshops on the Single Window concept

25. AAEC is seeking new donor partners to finance workshops in other countries.

IX. Participation in international meetings

A. Information and communication technology awareness-raising days for members of parliament, Ndjamena, Chad, 5 and 6 December 2013

26. A workshop was held in Ndjamena, Chad, on 5 and 6 December 2013 to raise awareness of the issues involved in moving from audiovisual to digital media and the information society. The objective of this workshop for members of the Chadian General Assembly was to raise their awareness of the major issues in digital technology and to provide them with critical information they need to adopt effective legislation that will help promote the development of information and communication technologies in the country.

27. Gaindé 2000 made a presentation on "Africa and the challenges of e-commerce".

B. 2013 African Internet Governance Forum (United Nations Economic Commission for Africa). 22 to 26 September 2013

28. A forum on Internet governance organized by the United Nations Economic Commission for Africa in Nairobi from 22 to 26 September 2013 brought together several countries and experts.

C. Global Trade Facilitation Conference, 18 and 19 November, Bangkok, Thailand

29. The United Nations Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific organized a forum on the facilitation of global trade on 18 and 19 November 2013. The theme of the forum was "Beyond Single Window: Paperless Supply Chains for Trade Facilitation and Inclusive Development". The meeting was an opportunity to publicize AAEC and to discuss the challenges and obstacles to trade facilitation in Africa, as well as to promote the AAEC Guidelines for Single Window Implementation.

X. Conclusions and recommendations

30. The activities of the Rapporteur for Africa are currently carried out by the chair of the African Alliance for e-Commerce. Funding needs to be found for the Alliance's activities in the forthcoming period.